



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Five Alaska wildfire crews heading south to assist in western states

(Fairbanks, AK) – With wildfire season cooling down in Alaska and heating up in the western United States, the Alaska Division of Forestry and U.S. Forest Service are deploying a handful of initial attack crews to the Lower 48 to assist with firefighting efforts there.

Five initial attack crews will board a National Interagency Coordination Center jet in Anchorage on Wednesday morning to fly to the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho. From there, crews will be assigned to different fires around the western U.S.

The five crews heading south include the Pioneer Peak Interagency Hotshot Crew, the Gannett Glacier Type 2 Initial Attack Crew, the Tanana Chiefs Conference T2 IA Crew, the Yukon T2 IA Crew, all from the Division of Forestry, and the Region 10 T2 IA Crew from the U.S. Forest Service. Each crew consists of approximately 20 firefighters.

Wildland fire managers in Alaska are confident that sufficient personnel and aircraft remain in the state to respond to any wildfires that occur.

Because its fire season starts and ends earlier than most western states, Alaska routinely sends crews and other firefighting personnel to the Lower 48 in July, August and September when activity wanes here. Last year, Alaska sent approximately 400 personnel to western states to assist with wildfire suppression.

Alaska's wildfire season has been a largely uneventful one thus far. A cool and prolonged spring made for a slow start to the season and combined with the lack of any extended period of hot, dry weather, has kept fire activity relatively quiet around much of the state for most of the season. As of Tuesday morning, 288 wildfires had burned an estimated 272,000 acres across Alaska. In an average season, Alaska has approximately 500 fires that burn roughly 1.2 million acres.

A series of low pressure systems moving in from the Bering Sea has resulted in cooler, damper weather across much of the state in the past week and that weather pattern is expected to continue into next week. In the event warm, dry conditions return and elevate the fire danger in Alaska, managers are prepared to recall resources being sent to the Lower 48 if needed.

Sufficient resources will remain in Alaska to deal with any wildfire activity that does arise here. Approximately 50 smokejumpers and two hotshot crews, both with BLM Alaska Fire Service, will remain in state as will the Division of Forestry's White Mountain Type 2 Initial Attack Crew, and two Type 2 training crews, the North Star Fire Crew from BLM and the UAF Nanooks Wildland Fire Crew from the Division of Forestry. All five of those crews are currently working on two fires burning in the Yukon Flats north of Fairbanks but are available for initial attack if needed. The state also has 20 Type 2 Emergency Firefighting hand crews to call upon should the need arise.

The Division of Forestry and BLM AFS also have multiple firefighting aircraft on contract that remain in Alaska. The Division of Forestry has two air retardant tankers on call - one in Palmer and one in Fairbanks - and BLM AFS has four water-scooping aircraft on contract at Fort Wainwright in Fairbanks. Both agencies also have several contract helicopters that are strategically located around the state for initial attack response through early August.

In addition to the five crews heading south on Wednesday, approximately 40 other firefighting personnel from the Division of Forestry are already in the Lower 48 working on fires. Those personnel are filling a variety of overhead and support positions.

Thirty large, uncontained fires are currently burning in 12 western states and more than 15,600 personnel have been deployed to combat them.

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